

Message Text

SECRET

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY

INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY

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EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS

SUBJECT: SA-7'S

1. THE SYRIANS APPARENTLY CONTINUE TO TRANSFER SA-7 MIS-SILES TO LEBANON, OSTENSIBLY TO PROTECT PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMPS AGAINST ISRAELI AIR ATTACKS. INTELLIGENCE REPORTS PERSIST TO THE EFFECT THAT UNITS OF THE SYRIAN ARMY, SA'QQA, AND THE PALESTINIAN LIBERATION ARMY HAVE SA-7'S IN LEBANON. OUR FEAR IS THAT THIS WEAPON MAY FIND ITS WAY INTO THE HANDS OF THOSE WHO WOULD BE PREPARED TO USE IT AGAINST INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AIRCRAFT, INCLUDING PLANES USING BEIRUT AIRPORT, OR WOULD FIND SOME WAY TO TRANSFER IT ABROAD FOR SIMILAR PURPOSES.

2. FOR MOSCOW: AS WE HAVE INDICATED ON SEVERAL PREVIOUS

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OCCASIONS, YOU SHOULD REITERATE AT AN APPROPRIATE LEVEL

THAT WE WISH THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT TO KNOW OF OUR CONTINUED CONCERN OVER THE LOOSE CONTROL WHICH THE SOVIETS HAVE EXERCISED OVER THE DISTRIBUTION OF THIS WEAPON, WHICH SOME TERRORISTS OBVIOUSLY WOULD LIKE TO USE AGAINST CIVILIAN AIRCRAFT, AS WAS THE INTENTION OF A GROUP IN ROME LAST WINTER. WE APPRECIATE THAT THOSE MISSILES, WHICH CONTINUE TO FIND THEIR WAY INTO SOUTH LEBANON, ARE OSTENSIBLY UNDER SYRIAN ARMY OR SA'IQA CONTROL AND ARE PROBABLY INTENDED FOR USE AGAINST ISRAELI MILITARY AIRCRAFT. OUR FEAR IS THAT THEY CAN BE EASILY DIVERTED BY THOSE GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS

WHO WOULD NOT HESITATE TO USE THEM AGAINST CIVILIAN AIRLINERS AT BEIRUT AND OTHER AIRPORTS. AN ACCIDENT CAUSED BY SUCH TERRORISM WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT THE INTERESTS OF ALL PARTIES CONCERNED AND WOULD RUN COUNTER TO OUR CONTINUING JOINT EFFORTS TO ASSURE THE SAFETY OF INTERNATIONAL AIR TRAVEL AND TO FACILITATE A JUST AND LASTING PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST. THE ROME INCIDENT, WHEREIN TERRORISTS WERE APPREHENDED WITH SA-7'S INTENDED FOR USE AGAINST A CIVILIAN AIRCRAFT, ILLUSTRATES DRAMATICALLY THE POTENTIAL FOR AN INCIDENT WHICH COULD RESULT IN THE TRAGIC LOSS OF A LARGE NUMBER OF INNOCENT LIVES. RESPONSIBILITY WOULD REST HEAVILY ON USSR. THIS WOULD ALSO GIVE OPPONENTS OF DETENTE IN US ANOTHER ARGUMENT TO USE AGAINST ADMINISTRATION. THE PROLIFERATION OF THIS WEAPON IN LEBANON AND ELSEWHERE INCREASES SUCH LIKELIHOOD AND OBLIGES US TO URGE THE TIGHTENING OF CONTROL OVER THEIR DISTRIBUTION SO AS TO AVOID THEIR FALLING INTO FEDAYEEN AND POTENTIALLY TERRORIST HANDS. THE MISSILES SHOULD AT LEAST BE MAINTAINED UNDER TIGHT AND EXCLUSIVE SYRIAN CONTROL. SHOULD THE SOVIETS ASK ON WHAT WE BASE OUR BELIEF OF CONTINUED RESUPPLY OF SA-7'S IN LEBANON, YOU MIGHT SAY WE HAVE, E.G., LEARNED THAT IN MID-DECEMBER A FEDAYEEN TRUCK BEARING THIS WEAPON WAS SEEN AT A ROADBLOCK ON THE BEIRUT-DAMASCUS ROAD. IF EMBASSY PERCEIVES NO OBJECTION, IT MIGHT BE SUGGESTED THAT AS A FIRST STEP THE MISSILES SHOULD BE RETURNED TO SYRIA AND RETAINED UNDER SYRIAN ARMY CONTROL.

3. FOR DAMASCUS: MOST EFFECTIVE CHANNEL FOR RAISING
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THIS MATTER MIGHT BE THROUGH GENERAL SHIHABI BUT LEAVE TO YOU DECISION WHETHER TO DO IT WITH HIM OR OTHER SENIOR SARG OFFICIAL. YOU SHOULD SAY WE ARE CONCERNED OVER PERSISTENT REPORTS OF TRANSFER OF LARGE NUMBERS OF SA-7'S TO ELEMENTS IN LEBANON. WE ARE APPREHENSIVE THAT THESE WEAPONS MIGHT FALL INTO HANDS OF GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS WHO WOULD NOT HESITATE TO USE THEM AGAINST CIVILIAN AIRCRAFT AT BEIRUT OR OTHER INTERNATIONAL AIRPORTS. AS

SARG IS AWARE, AN INCIDENT OF THIS TYPE ALMOST OCCURRED
AT ROME AIRPORT IN 1973. WE ARE SURE SARG IS NO LESS
ANXIOUS THAN USG TO AVOID TRAGEDY WHICH WOULD RESULT FROM
USE OF SA-7'S AGAINST CIVILIAN AIRCRAFT AND WOULD HOPE
SARG WOULD TAKE ALL POSSIBLE MEASURES TO ASSURE THAT
WEAPONS OF THIS TYPE ARE KEPT UNDER STRICT CONTROL OF
SYRIAN ARMED FORCES IN SYRIA. KISSINGER

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